

FEBRUARY 15 – 28, 2017 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

MEADOW VOLE



(1) Meadow Vole, *Microtus pennsylvanicus*
© Dick Harlow

This little fellow is a prodigious producer of offspring! Under ideal conditions, plenty of food and no predators or deaths for a year, it has been estimated that a single pair of Meadow Voles, *Microtus pennsylvanicus*, can populate their environment in that year by a million! No wonder these rodents are sought after as food for raptors, foxes, coyotes and even herons. This fact is also why under the snow they are somewhat shielded to interact and to feed on your garden plants unmolested.



(2) Meadow Vole, *Microtus pennsylvanicus*
© Dick Harlow

Brown to black fur, short tail, short ears and small beady eyes are characteristic of a Meadow Vole.

Meadow Voles have a short life span. They are active 24/7 year round. They do have predators looking for them constantly. They do have disease, die and the environment is not always good to them. You can see that this species needs to be as secretively productive as possible. So it is

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no wonder why we do not tend to actually see them in the flesh. However, we do see evidence of their activity.



(3) Meadow Vole runways, © UConn Home & Garden Center

When the snow melts you will find that under that blanket of snow there is tunneling, a labyrinth of runways in the grass of your lawn, in the compost of your garden or in the grass of the local golf course.

The behavior of Meadow Voles is very social during winter, but as spring surges forward, females become very territorial. As well, males begin to become more dominant toward each other and individual battles commence until territories are established and mating begins.



(4) Meadow Vole, *Microtus pennsylvanicus*
© Dick Harlow

Picture (1 & 2) were taken in the spring of an adventurous Meadow Vole. The images are photographically “soft,” but they do show the whole living animal and give an indication of its size and alertness.

Picture (4) is a full camera view of a living Meadow Vole in the snow after the February 2017 snowstorm and picture (5) is a cropped enlargement. These two pictures are of a single Meadow

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Vole coming up from the snow under the bird feeders during the third week of February to grab dropped sunflower hearts. These pictures were taken early in the morning before the pigeons arrived. You can make out the tail to the left and the nose that is buried in the snow grabbing a seed. Once the pigeons descended on this area tamping the fluffy snow down there was no more evidence of Meadow Vole activity.

Here at EastView, along with foxes, coyotes and raptors, the American Crow also enjoys a vole for a meal if he can catch it. On the 19th of February I watched a crow carry a dead vole in its beak, hide it in some protruding grass and fly away. When another crow came down to steal the vole, the original owner came back with speed and agility and engaged the thief. The interloper gave up the vole immediately, so I suspect it was a teenage family member. The adult then took off with the vole. This was interesting behavior, first time I have witnessed it and can't find anything yet on whether this behavior is normal, or if it was simply an outlier.



(5) Meadow Vole, *Microtus pennsylvanicus*

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INVASIVE ORCHID



(1) Broad-leaved Helleborine, *Epipactis helleborine*
© Dick Harlow

It is hard for me to consider an Orchid as invasive, since in my mind, they represent not only beauty, but are unique in their evolution and development. However, picture 1 & 2 shows an orchid that covers much of Europe, Asia and North Africa and has become invasively naturalized in the US. Because it likes shaded woodland environments it will grow on the edges of many woodland areas that butt up to pastures, fields, meadows or marshes. In some Midwest states such as Wisconsin and Michigan it is considered invasive. Invasive means that without natural enemies to keep it in check the orchid will grow well enough to out-compete native plants and take over an area that otherwise would have been used by native plants and their associated animal relationships, in other words their ecology.



(2) Broad-leaved Helleborine, *Epipactis helleborine*
© Dick Harlow

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There are two color shades that you might see. Picture (1) shows a variety that is greenish and light purple or pink and (2) shows a greenish and darker red/purple colored variety.

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OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Eastern Coyote (Coywolf) – Heard
Gray Squirrel – 3 individuals
Eastern Cottontail – tracks in snow, scat
Meadow Vole – 1 individual, tracks and runways

Weather Tidbits

Month of FEBRUARY 1-28, 2017

[All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).](#)

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 215.4 mm or 8.5 inches

Overcast Days: 15

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: -1.8 C⁰/28.8⁰F

High Temp: 22.9 C⁰/73.2⁰F

Low Temp: -19.6 C⁰/-3.4⁰F

DAYS

MAX <0.0 C⁰ **10 DAYS**

MIN >0.0 C⁰ **24 DAYS**

MAX <-18.0 C⁰ **1 DAY**